

On a cold misty February morning in 2008, Chandu hurried to pick up his daily newspaper. He browsed the pages as he sipped his milk tea. "This is it", he thought out loud, looking at an advertisement calling emerging film makers to be part of an HIV/AIDS prevention short-film competition.



Sponsored by USAID's Nepal Social Marketing and Franchising Project (N-MARC), the competition challenged film makers to develop 8-minute short-films that would stimulate greater understanding of individual risks and promote condom use. The film competition would be part of a larger campaign titled You Are No Exception.

In April, along with eight other film makers, Chandu began preparations for the shooting of his first-ever film Apbad (exception). Beth Paige, USAID/Nepal Mission Director, inaugurated the competition in August by marking the first scene of one of the films. The film shooting thus began. Films were shot in various locations across the country, ranging from the hills of the far west to the streets of Kathmandu, with a detour to the plains of the Terai.

In September, the short-films premiered in over 150 cinema theatres covering 70% of the country. This was followed by a promotional tour and Cinema on Wheels, a series of open-air screenings, where each film crew (including the celebrities involved) traveled to 22 high-risk districts along Nepal's east-west highway to interact with audiences and media. Over 200,000 people watched these short-films.

The You Are No Exception campaign culminated on December 13, 2008, with an award ceremony hosted by the U.S. Ambassador Nancy J. Powell where the top three films were announced and honored. Nepal Investment Bank, a private financial institution, partnered with USAID to sponsor prizes for the winners – a three-month intensive film directing course in Mumbai. "My film is very compelling and reaches audiences with key HIV/AIDS prevention messages most creatively," Chandu said confidently just two days before the D-day.

The evening of the awards ceremony was tense, with all nine film makers expecting and wanting to win. 'Horn Please' by Abinash Shah was announced second runner-up. Asif Shah's 'Sonam' bagged the title of first runner-up. With a confident smile and eyes sparkling, Chandu told the media: "I knew my film Apbad was going to be the winner."